

## Nevada County Transportation Commission

The Nevada County Transportation Commission (NCTC) is the Regional Transportation Planning Agency for Nevada County. NCTC coordinates state and federal transportation programs for Nevada County, the City of Grass Valley, Nevada City, and the Town of Truckee.

### 2005 NCTC Commissioners

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Nevada County District I Supervisor

#### Tim Brady

Member-at-Large

#### Patti Ingram, Chairman

Grass Valley City Council

#### Russ Steele

Member-at-Large

#### Josh Susman

Truckee Town Council

#### Robin Sutherland

Nevada County District IV Supervisor

#### Conley Weaver, Vice-Chairman

Mayor, City of Nevada City

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The Nevada County Transportation Commission Newsletter is published quarterly. If you would like to be added to the mailing list, please write or call the Nevada County Transportation Commission office.

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### Upcoming NCTC Meeting

The next meeting of the Nevada County Transportation Commission is scheduled on:

**Wednesday, September 21, 2005 at 8:30 a.m., Grass Valley City Council Chambers, 125 East Main Street, Grass Valley, CA.**

# NEVADA COUNTY TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION NEWSLETTER

Issue 25

"Creating a better future by building upon successes of the past"

August 2005

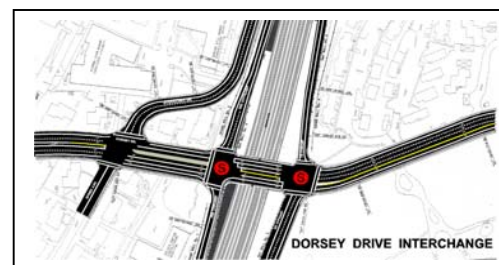


## Multiple Needs vs. Limited Dollars! What Would You Do?

*The Nevada County Transportation Commission strives to* maintain and improve the components of the transportation system in our County. However, there are two key factors we currently face: The first factor is there are more needs than there are monies to fill the needs. The second factor is the traditional way of fully funding projects is no longer an option (see "Funding Challenges" on page 2). So we ask, "How do we go forward from here?"

☞ ☞

Let's start by identifying projects the local jurisdictions of the County have determined to be the most important to fund. Nearly everyone agrees that the **Dorsey Drive Interchange** is the #1 project we want to see built. The current situation is the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) funds added to the Regional Transportation Mitigation Fee (RTMF) funds do not provide enough money to build the whole interchange. The current shortfall is about \$10 million.



Proposed Dorsey Drive Interchange

The escalation of real estate prices in Nevada County have added to the funding needed to purchase right-of-way for this project, and the continuing increase in the cost of construction materials, make it difficult to acquire sufficient funds to start construction as scheduled in 2009.

Another important project in Nevada County is the widening of the SR 89 Union Pacific Railroad Undercrossing in Truckee,

known to locals as the **"Mousehole"**. This narrow two lane tunnel impedes traffic flow and is a hazard for pedestrians and bicyclists who travel through it to get to a nearby shopping center. The State budget crisis prevented allocation of \$498,000 to start this project. A recent earmark of \$2.8 million in Federal funds requires a 20% match of local funds and the project total is estimated at \$9 to \$12 million. We are looking at a shortfall of \$6 to \$9 million to complete the project with current dollars.



Truckee Mousehole

The challenge before us is to acquire the additional revenue needed for the Dorsey Drive Interchange, the Mousehole, and for the other projects and modes of transportation important to our transportation system.

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### Inside this Issue:

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### Alternate Modes of Transportation

Transit buses, bicycles, and walking are preferred means of transportation used by many citizens of Nevada County to get around town or to travel to other parts of the county. In recent years transit services in Nevada



Transfer Station in Grass Valley

County have been faced with the challenge of maintaining service levels when the existing revenue sources are not keeping pace with increased operating expenses. Several routes have been changed and service reduced to avoid a shortfall in the operating budget.

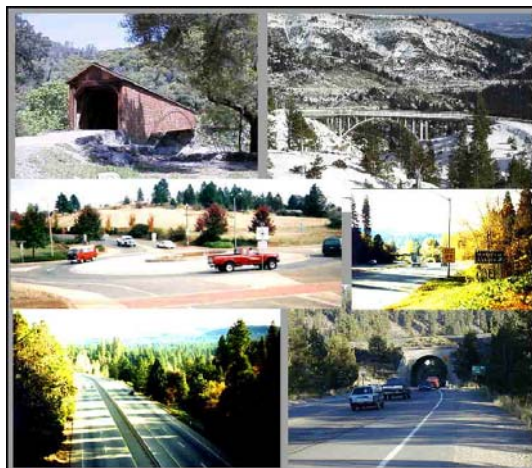
In August the County received an earmark from the Federal Transportation Act reauthorization to develop a new Gold Country Stage Transfer Center to replace the current Church and Neal Street location. The \$777,747 in federal funds requires a 20% local match.

The replacement of transit vehicles is another funding challenge. During the 1990's replacement revenues were received from Proposition 116 grant funds, which are no longer available. Projections of transit revenue sources and operating costs over the next ten years indicate a deficit of approximately \$1,208,933 in western Nevada County and a \$498,163 deficit for transit services in the Town of Truckee. These deficits do not include vehicle replacement needs. In order to maintain existing transit service levels, additional revenue sources will need to be found.

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## Nevada County Transportation Commission Newsletter

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Transportation Projects and Funding - Continued

**SR 49 widening and signalization at La Barr Meadows Road** is another project in progress. Recently Caltrans held three public workshops to display the proposed plans for this intersection (see project detail in May 2005 newsletter). The original plan was to seek funding to widen the corridor from Combie Road to Grass Valley. However, when it became apparent that the State would not be able to provide adequate funding for that large of a project, NCTC worked with Caltrans to reduce the scope of the project to a fundable size. In January 2005 the Federal Highway Administration approved the concept of widening the corridor one section at a time. This strategy freed up \$3.5 million that was previously set aside just for the environmental work on the entire corridor.

The total cost of the La Barr Meadows Road project is \$18.1 million. NCTC programmed \$9.05 million from Regional Improvement Program funds, and Caltrans programmed \$9.05 million of Interregional Improvement Program funds for the project. In order to keep the project on schedule, \$8.9 million must be allocated by January 2007.

**Maintenance of roadways** suffered in recent years as sources of funding dried up throughout the State. This caused agencies to respond to the most urgent, safety-related needs. The Nevada County Department of Transportation and Sanitation (DOTS) is at a point where



Shoulder widening on SR 49 between Lime Kiln Road and Pekolee Road currently under construction

roads that were scheduled to repave on an eighteen to twenty year cycle, will have to wait as much as fifty years due to a lack of funds. With 45% of the roads in western Nevada County already in a fair to poor condition, we need to be more creative in funding maintenance projects.

Every \$1 spent on preventive maintenance delays spending \$6 on rehabilitation and \$20 on reconstruction of roadways. Therefore it makes sense to invest in preventive maintenance to avoid costly repairs and replacement and to keep the roads in good condition.

Our main revenue source for maintenance is the gas tax. Why doesn't the gas tax fully cover expenses anymore? The gas tax rate has not increased for many years so it has not kept up with inflation rates.



• State gas tax in 1957	6 cents
• If adjusted for inflation in 2005	32.5 cents
• Actual current gas tax	18 cents
• Below the 1957 buying power	14.5 cents

Also, with production of more fuel-efficient vehicles the gas tax brings in a lesser amount of revenue. In 1974 new vehicle fuel economy was 14 mpg. That rate changed to 28 mpg in 2005, so we are collecting fewer cents per gallon and driving twice as many miles per gallon. Add to these tax and fuel efficiency factors the higher cost to provide maintenance and you can see where all the money has gone.

**Funding Challenges** — A factor NCTC faces when planning and implementing transportation projects is that State and Federal funds, relied on in the past to fully fund projects, have dwindled or no longer exist. For eighty years motor fuel taxes paid for building and operating of most major roads in the U.S. Although Federal and State fuel taxes are still the largest source of revenue, the money collected is not enough to finance maintenance and improvements. Instead of raising fuel taxes, legislators are allowing local governments to raise funds, thus changing the basis of transportation financing.

This lack of dollars has caused local agencies to become more creative when funding projects. “Partnerships” with Caltrans and private developers have become commonplace. But we are finding it is only a partial solution. As roadways continue to deteriorate in our County and the population increases, there is a greater strain on our system and therefore a greater urgency to find solutions.

In December 2002 the NCTC reviewed a report created by consultant Arthur Bauer and Associates regarding the funding gap between revenue and cost of projects. The report found a local sales tax to be the most viable option to close the funding gap.

At the May 2005 NCTC meeting the Bauer report was reviewed again with updated information. Commissioner Susman shared the Town of Truckee's success at implementing a sales tax measure. In 1999 Truckee voters approved a ½ cent sales tax increase for a twelve-year period. The measure has been so successful that all of the improvements identified have been completed in just six years. As a result of this discussion, staff was directed to bring back an action item to the July meeting suggesting steps toward a solution to funding the County's transportation shortfall.

**Going Forward** — A motion passed at the July 2005 NCTC meeting directing staff to create a Request For Proposals to be sent to consulting firms who could conduct a public opinion survey of county transportation needs. NCTC Executive Director Dan Landon indicated that the survey questions would encompass eastern and western Nevada County citizen's opinions on transportation needs, such as state highway and local road improvements, maintenance, public transit services, and pedestrian and bicycle facilities. It would also inquire what revenue mechanisms citizens would support to pay for the desired improvements.

Mr. Landon noted that eighteen California counties have approved sales tax measures and their citizens make up 80% of the State's population. The popularity of local sales tax measures for transportation are due, in part, to the fact that voters designate which projects will be funded. Also, money collected is under the control of a local authority and cannot be diverted to other counties or to the State. Local sales tax measures are approved for a specified time period, so this allows local voters to determine when it will start and end. Tourists and other visitors that purchase goods and services within the community also contribute toward the transportation system through a local sales tax measure.

Over the next ten years transportation needs in Nevada County will likely exceed \$131.5 million. Current revenue sources are expected to generate \$45 million, leaving a potential deficit of \$85.5 million. This would mean many of the critical transportation projects would not be funded. A ½ cent sales tax for ten years would provide \$78 million.

**What “you” can do** — The future levels of service in Nevada County depend on this generation being proactive to face some tough issues and to create a plan to go forward with priorities identified and agreed upon by the majority of the County's citizens. **Let your voice be heard through this survey.** You can share your opinion when contacted by the survey team or share your comments on the NCTC website, once the survey is in process. Watch for more information in the November NCTC Newsletter for timing of the survey. [NCTC](#)



Regional Transportation Mitigation Fee (RTMF)

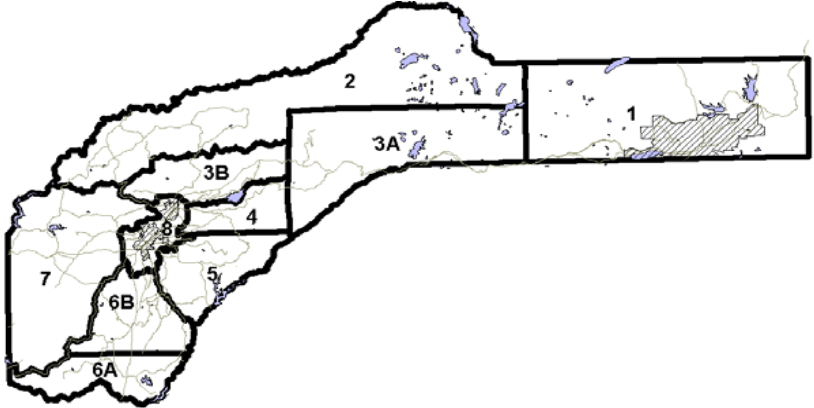
Communities throughout the State have resorted to the use of mitigation fees to help fund transportation improvements. These fees are charged to developers, business owners, and residents when building permits are issued for new construction. In Nevada County the RTMF fees are based on the number of additional trips the proposed construction will put onto the regional road system, and the “Fee Zone” that the construction site is located in. There are nine Fee Zones in western Nevada County, as indicated below. The Truckee area has a separate mitigation fee program.

In western Nevada County RTMF revenues over the past four years have averaged \$220,000 annually. Even though this is a significant revenue stream, monies are not coming in fast enough to construct improvements to avoid traffic congestion. What can be done to increase the funding flow and construct projects in a timely fashion? An example of a creative partnership is the \*Brunswick Road/Sutton Way intersection improvement (listed below) which is in progress and is being funded by a business owner who wanted to accelerate the intersection project to allow the relocation of his business. The RTMF program will reimburse the business owner for the portion of funds that are not his responsibility. [NCTC](#)

Regional Transportation Mitigation Fee Projects at 2005 Costs:

Brunswick Road / Dorsey Drive Signal & Widening	\$281,032
Brunswick Road to SR 20 modify Signal & Rechannel Onramp	\$337,239
Brunswick Road / Old Tunnel Signal	\$224,826
* Brunswick Road / Sutton Way Intersection Improvement (partnership)	\$281,032
Dorsey Drive Interchange (RTMF covers 47% of cost)	\$10,886,043
East Main Street / Bennett St. Realignment, Signal & Striping	\$1,686,194
Gold Flat Interchange Ramps Intersection Improvements	\$281,032
Idaho-Maryland / East Main Street Ramps Intersection Improvements	\$393,445
McKnight Road Dual Roundabouts & Striping	\$814,994
McKnight Widening Freeman to Taylorville Road	\$393,445
Mill Street / McCourtney Road Intersection Improvements	\$419,300
Mill Street Intersection Improvements at SR 20 WB Ramp	\$259,674
Nevada City Highway / Joerschke Signal	\$168,619
South Auburn Street / Colfax Avenue Intersection Improvements	\$562,065
South Auburn Street / Empire Street Signal	\$140,516

TOTAL COST OF PROJECTS	\$17,129,457
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Western Nevada County Traffic Impact Mitigation Fee Zones

Fee Zone 2 -	\$138 per trip
Fee Zone 3A -	\$121 per trip
Fee Zone 3B -	\$327 per trip
Fee Zone 4 -	\$250 per trip
Fee Zone 5 -	\$169 per trip
Fee Zone 6A -	\$98 per trip
Fee Zone 6B -	\$268 per trip
Fee Zone 7 -	\$136 per trip
Fee Zone 8 -	\$630 per trip

Alternate Modes of Transportation – Continued

The limited number of bikeways and pedestrian facilities in Nevada County may be discouraging residents from bicycling and walking. In order for non-motorized transportation to be a viable option, it must be safe, attractive, and easy to utilize. On-street parking in downtown areas, narrow roadways, limited right-of-way, and topographical constraints make planning these facilities a challenge and proposed projects are often very expensive.

In 2001 the Nevada County Department of Transportation and Sanitation (DOTS) completed the *Nevada County Non-Motorized Transportation Master Plan*. This plan identifies future commute, sidewalk, and Safe Routes to School facilities. It also identifies general corridors to be studied in the future for possible development of recreational trails. The cost of potential bicycle commute projects are estimated at \$8,510,000, the Safe Routes to School projects are estimated at \$1,935,000, and \$417,000 is estimated for pedestrian projects.

The Grass Valley Parks and Recreation Department completed a Master Plan in 2001 developing a trail/sidewalk framework of potential future projects. The City is currently completing a planning study to develop a concept for a trail and parkway along the Wolf Creek corridor.

In April 2002 the Town of Truckee completed a *Truckee Trails and Bikeways Master Plan*. It focused on both recreational trails and on-street bikeways to establish a town-wide system that will guide incremental development of trails and bikeways as funds are available.

The Truckee River Legacy Trail project was awarded \$294,120 in Transportation Enhancement Activities (TEA) funds, \$125,000 in Local Transportation Funds (LTF), plus funds from the Truckee Town Council and the Truckee Donner Recreation and Park District. The six-mile trail is being built in phases, partially with volunteer labor and supplies.

Two principal funding sources over the next ten years for pedestrian and bicycle projects are LTF funds (\$596,261) and TEA funds (\$1,891,660).



Bicyclists in Truckee